

For more information or assistance call:

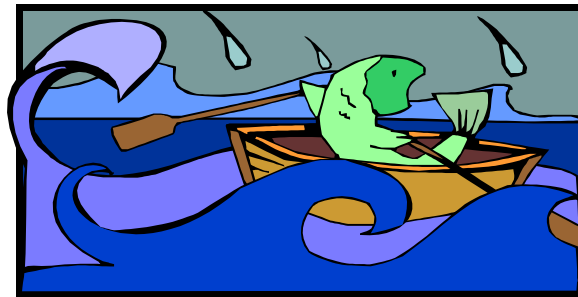
- Your local Town Office or Solid Waste Facility.
- The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) at (800) 452-1942 and ask for the Household Hazardous Waste Program.
- Spills: Call the DEP at (800) 452-4664.
- The Maine Bureau of Health toll free at (866)292-3474 for information on fish consumption advisories.
- If human contact with mercury occurs, call the Maine Poison Control Center at (800) 442-6305.

To find out more, visit the DEP web site at  
<http://www.state.me.us/dep/mercury>



This brochure was produced by the  
Maine Department of  
Environmental Protection  
Household Hazardous Waste Program  
17 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

# LET'S GET MERCURY OUT OF MAINE'S ENVIRONMENT



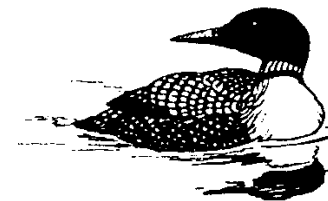
## YOU CAN HELP!

## What is mercury?

Mercury is a naturally occurring metal. It is liquid at room temperature, binds easily with other metals and conducts electricity well. Because of these properties, mercury has been used in many household, medical and industrial products.

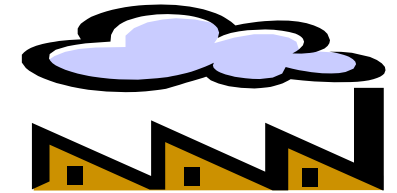
## Why is mercury of concern?

When mercury gets into our waterways, it changes. Through a natural chemical process it becomes methyl mercury, which is much more toxic. Methyl mercury in the food chain builds up in the tissue of fish and animals. It can cause weight loss, reproductive problems and early death. In humans, mercury is a neurotoxin. This means it slows fetal and child development and impairs brain function. High exposure can cause tremors, numbness of fingers and toes, loss of muscle control, memory loss, and kidney disease.



## How does mercury get into Maine's environment?

Most mercury in the environment comes from human activities. Mercury enters the air in the emissions from coal burning power plants and waste incinerators. It enters our lakes, streams and rivers through rain and snow, through improper disposal of household products, and through wastewater discharges.



## How much is too much?

Mercury is toxic in very small quantities. Because mercury builds up in the food chain, even very small amounts of mercury in the water can make fish unsafe to eat and cause reproductive problems for wildlife such as loons. Also, mercury volatilizes at room temperature; this means that a small spill (1/2 teaspoon) indoors can create mercury levels in the air that are unsafe to breathe. One Maine school recently spent more than \$20,000 to clean up a spill from a single broken barometer so that students and staff would not breathe toxic mercury fumes!

## Is mercury a problem in Maine?

Yes. Mercury has been found in bass, perch, pickerel, trout, salmon and eels as well as in our eagle and loon populations. Other fish eating animals are also at risk. Maine, like many other states, has fish consumption advisories that establish limits on the number of fish meals women and children can safely eat.



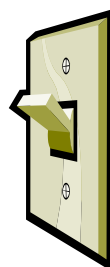
## Where is mercury in my home?

Do a mercury search! Most commonly mercury is found in:

- Thermometers (fever, candy, fry, indoor/outdoor, oven).
- Thermostats (nonelectronic)
- Older paints
- Fluorescent lights
- Pilot light sensors in gas stoves, water heaters and dryers
- Barometers
- Button cell batteries

- Clothes irons with automatic or tilt shutoff
- Blood pressure cuffs
- Switches and relays in some chest freezers, older washing machines, sump and bilge pumps, and electric space heaters.
- Silent light switches.
- Topical disinfectants with Mercurochrome or Tincture of Merthiolate
- Antibacterial products with thimerosal or merbromin
- Vintage toys
- Chemistry sets
- Dental fillings
- LA Gear® athletic shoes made before 1997 with flashing lights
- Grandfather clock weights
- Antique mirrors

This list is not complete! Check with the DEP Household Hazardous Waste Program if you have any questions.



## How can I prevent mercury pollution?

State and local governments are working together to develop a collection system for mercury containing products. Here's what you can do:

- ✓ Do a home audit and label mercury containing products.
- ✓ READ LABELS! Avoid buying products with mercury when substitutes are available.
- ✓ Ask your dentist for fillings that don't contain mercury amalgam.
- ✓ Use fluorescent lights. Although they have a little mercury they save a lot of electricity, reducing reliance on coal burning power plants - a major source of mercury pollution.
- ✓ RECYCLE mercury containing products. Call your town office or the Maine DEP at 800-452-1942 for information about local collection events or the nearest household hazardous waste collection center.



## What do I do if I break a mercury containing item?

**Thermometers:** Never use a vacuum to clean up a mercury spill! First, open windows to air out the room. If the thermometer breaks on a smooth surface, you can use two pieces of stiff paper to scoop all the beads into a sealable plastic container. If necessary, or on a carpet, use an eye dropper to capture the beads of mercury. Pick up any remaining beads of mercury with sticky tape. Put any contaminated portion of carpet and all cleanup materials in a plastic container. Take all materials to a household hazardous waste collection center or call Maine DEP at 1-800-452-1942.

For larger spills, call the Maine DEP Response at 800-452-4664 immediately!

**Fluorescent bulbs:** If a bulb breaks accidentally, scoop the pieces and powder into a sealable, plastic container. Air out the room.

Wipe the area with a damp sponge and take all cleanup materials to a household hazardous waste collection center or call Maine DEP at 1-800-452-1942.

